

GAUBIUS ON HYPOTHESES
IN PATHOLOGY

“**B**UT what I have frequently hinted to you, and I think cannot be too often repeated, is, that every thing which is taught in Pathology, i.e. the theory of the diseased state, ought to be of some use in the practice of physic, as it is called, by which is attained the manner of distinguishing and curing diseases. Things, therefore, ought not to be imprudently connected with the art of healing (of itself but indeed too extensive), which have no relation thereto. Neither ought we to be too intent upon this; but what should be much more our endeavour is, that only such theorems be proposed, concerning the truth of which there is the clearest evidence, from faithful observation and sound reasoning, the only sure foundation of medicine instituted upon rational principles; and therefore all such things should be rejected as are uncertain, doubtful and fallacious, or such as are built upon mere hypotheses, and cannot stand the test of science; at least, they should be considered in such a light, as not to be estimated above the value, or vended above the price. I know indeed that these hypotheses, especially when they are eloquently, and with confidence set forth by the teacher, in a method planned with ingenuity, polished with elegance, and scientifically handled, as is said, are, with pleasure, eagerness and avidity, grasped at by credulous youth. It is truly excellent to be able to render a reason for every thing, and by the acuteness of the judgment to solve every difficulty, and in a dark, and intricate way, where prudence, fearing to wander from the path, or fall headlong, walks timidly, and often makes a stop, to bear a torch in her hand. It would be more excellent still, if the secrets of nature, which elude our most attentive observation, and cannot be made out even by the most wary reasoning, could be explicated by conjecture, and as it were by certain divination, like one who sees in a dream that which is incomprehensible to him while awake. It would be the most excellent thing of all, if a system could be composed every way polished and complete, in which beginners would find every thing handled with plainness and simplicity.

“Even I would give applause, if diseases would yield to the invention of opinion; if a physician was to be esteemed the more perfect, in proportion as he was loquacious; if nature would suffer herself to be

modelled according to their hypotheses; at least these things, I think, ought to be tolerated; if speculation alone constituted the physician, and that theory had nothing in common with practice, or but its own mistakes, when left to itself, did not pervert the cure of diseases. But it is indeed but too manifest how many evils, and those not of the least importance, are derived from this source upon the most excellent of arts.

“When I consider with myself how many unhappy consequences ensue from obstinately persisting in false hypotheses, and an erroneous way of reasoning, to which the practice is adapted; how often health is ruined by an improper regimen, diseases protracted by a preposterous method of cure, and finally, how many untimely deaths are thus occasioned; it is not without concern, I must say, that I am in doubt whether mankind are more benefited or hurt by the medical art. But I cease to say any more upon this head, lest I may furnish more matter for detraction, of which there is but too much already. . . .”

—GABIUS, H. D. *The Institutions of Medicinal Pathology*. Tr. by C. Erskine. Edinburgh, Elliott and Cadell, 1779, pp. iv-vi.